

Persistence and teamwork for new horizons: Exploring a distributed teaching model in support of information literacy competencies

Authors:

Isabel Altamirano – Engineering and Chemistry Librarian, Georgia Tech, Georgia Tech Library, 266 4th St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30332-0900

Marlee Givens – Librarian for Modern Languages and Library Learning Consultant, Georgia Tech Library, 266 4th St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30332-0900

Liz Holdsworth – STEM Librarian, Georgia Tech, Georgia Tech Library, 266 4th St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30332-0900

Ximin Mi – Data Visualization Librarian, Georgia Tech, Georgia Tech Library, 266 4th St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30332-0900

Fred Rascoe – Aerospace Engineering and Scholarly Communication Librarian, Georgia Tech, Georgia Tech Library, 266 4th St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30332-0900

Karen Viars – Humanities and Science Fiction Librarian, Georgia Tech, Georgia Tech Library, 266 4th St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30332-0900

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PERSISTENCE AND TEAMWORK FOR NEW HORIZONS: EXPLORING A DISTRIBUTED TEACHING MODEL IN SUPPORT OF INFORMATION LITERACY COMPETENCIES

**ISABEL ALTAMIRANO, MARLEE GIVENS, LIZ HOLDSWORTH, XIMIN MI, FRED RASCOE AND
KAREN VIARS**

BACKGROUND

The Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) is a highly selective, technology-focused research institution. All first-year students are expected to fulfill core curriculum requirements, one of which is the requirement to “demonstrate proficiency in the process of articulating and organizing rhetorical arguments in written, oral, visual, and nonverbal modes, using concrete support and conventional language” (Georgia Tech Registrar’s Office, n.d.). Students can fulfill this curriculum requirement by taking two courses, English 1101 and English 1102. English 1101 introduces rhetorical principles and multimodal composing; English 1102 continues with the lessons of the previous course while introducing research, cultural studies, and literary/discourse analysis (Georgia Tech Catalog, n.d.).

Both English 1101 and English 1102, which almost every new undergraduate student must take, are offered through the School of Literature and Media Communication (LMC) at Georgia Tech by the Brittain Fellows. For more than 20 years, the Brittain Fellowship program at Georgia Tech has awarded an opportunity for newly minted PhD graduates in English, literature, communication, and similar fields to “develop innovative teaching and scholarship in writing and communication in their role as faculty members” in the instruction of first year students (Ogden, 2000). Brittain Fellows are encouraged to experiment and exercise pedagogical creativity, emphasizing the use of various designs of information in representative media in a multimodal curriculum (Cooper and Burnett, 2010). The Brittain Fellows usually include an aspect of their research interests as a focus for the class, thereby meeting these curriculum requirements within a specific scholarly, cultural, and technological context. Typically, the Brittain Fellows move on from Georgia Tech after two to three years.

Historically, the library, and particularly the LMC liaison, has had a strong relationship with the Brittain Fellows, which has allowed the library to reach nearly every undergraduate student who comes to Georgia Tech. Because of this enduring relationship, the LMC liaison librarian took on a course load of dozens of one-shot in-class instruction sessions every fall and spring semester. While the instruction sessions were well-received and appreciated, this responsibility overstretched the schedule of the single LMC liaison to the detriment of other work duties, including collaborations, consultations, and other traditional liaison work with LMC faculty members. In addition, scheduling conflicts meant that the LMC liaison could not accommodate every teaching request.

At the Georgia Tech Library, fifteen librarians have outreach and instruction responsibilities. These librarians belong to the recently-created Campus Engagement and Scholarly Outreach (CESO) department. Most of the librarians in CESO act as a liaison to one or more colleges or schools on campus, or as subject matter experts in one or more disciplines. They have diverse educational backgrounds and work experience. In order to fulfill all of the instruction requests from Britain Fellows as well as her other duties, Karen Viars, the LMC librarian, worked with the head of the CESO department to put together a team of librarians to share the teaching load. Five librarians

volunteered to help. The Fall 2017 instruction team consisted of: Karen Viars, Fred Rascoe (liaison to Aerospace Engineering), Marlee Givens (liaison to Modern Languages), Isabel Altamirano (liaison to Engineering and Chemistry), Liz Holdsworth (liaison to STEM disciplines), and Ximin Mi (subject matter expert for data visualization).

While the new team of librarians were all experienced with instruction of library resources and services, none had instructed first year students in English courses as a primary duty. As the leader of the collaborative team, Viars led a series of training orientations that introduced the team to the learning outcomes of English 1101/1102, familiarized them with the Brittain Fellows, and provided active learning strategies and lesson plans already in use for the classes. At the end of the training sessions, each librarian on the team designed and presented a demonstration class for the other team members to provide feedback and suggestions. Starting in August of 2017, Viars organized meetings, assigned classes, and provided a framework for the English 1101 sections. The members of the distributed instruction team had varied, mostly positive experiences in practice.

NEW COLLABORATIVE TEACHING MODEL IN PRACTICE

Isabel Altamirano interviewed her colleagues in March 2018 and has synthesized the narrative of teaching experiences below.

One of the more rewarding aspects of teaching the English 1101 sections was the variety of intellectual experiences. Viars, as instruction coordinator, provided flexible templates and adaptable learning outcomes. Altering the skillsets to the shifting content and needs of the Fellows was then a simple process. Favorite topics included the conceptual history of the teenage girl, African American artists, disease, and community web resources.

Tailoring each class to the assignment and learning outcomes made the library instruction relevant to the students. Most of the librarians were able, either through email or in-person, to work with the faculty before each session and this pre-session contact with the Fellows for Fall 2017 tended to be successful. Altamirano was able to create search examples and workshop slides in collaboration with her faculty. She uploaded her presentation to the learning management system so the students could review the content ahead of the lesson. By discussing expectations ahead of time, Givens felt she could create more of a meaningful and supportive lesson for the Fellows.

Following up with both students and faculty after each session helped each librarian receive necessary feedback. This was essential, as an instructor's impressions of a session could be divergent from its effects. Rascoe received positive feedback from faculty after classes with low student engagement; he also received many questions on basic skills from students after a high energy, responsive class. Givens won praise from faculty in follow-up emails. Holdsworth and Viars engaged with students from their English classes on Twitter.

Despite careful preparation and communication, there were challenges for each librarian. For example, pre-session communications with Fellows had mixed results. Rascoe was successful in meeting with each Fellow in person. However, one professor expected far too much in both depth and breadth for a 45-minute session and Rascoe was unable to reset the scale of the faculty member's request. Holdsworth could not make contact with all of the Fellows assigned to her. When she did make contact, the Fellows did not always express their needs clearly or completely, which led to sessions in which she could not tailor her classes to the assignments.

The time constraints of the sessions were sometimes challenging. Givens learned that 50 minutes was not enough to cover both the material and all of the active learning techniques that the faculty had requested. Altamirano had to rework the provided templates to accommodate an extended, 90-minute session. Without advance notice and communication with the professor, this would have been difficult.

Overall, the instruction team enjoyed the distributed teaching model and their interactions with the Brittain Fellows. Holdsworth appreciated the creativity in the Humanities students and faculty as a contrast to the sometime rigid needs of the STEM community with whom she works most often. Viars received positive feedback from her

faculty, saw no significant changes in the kinds of questions she received from students, and noted the overall shift in the culture of the Brittain Fellows to be more receptive to the GT Library. However, more rigorous assessment of the program did occur.

ASSESSMENT AND FUTURE

To understand the effectiveness of the library instruction, librarians on the instruction team designed an assessment survey. Guided by the assessment objectives, the instruction team determined that the survey should be directed to the Brittain Fellows instead of their students. The survey will be sent out at the end of every semester.

The survey consists of nine questions (see Appendix A): Six multiple-choice questions and three open-ended questions. It is intended to allow the respondents to provide quantitative and qualitative data to reflect their experience. As a new program and a new assessment effort, the team just completed the first cycle of gathering data. We expect to do further interpretation of the data to inform future work. Moving forward, the team plans to discuss ways to improve our assessment approach in order to raise the response rate.

Assessment Survey Results

In the first semester of the instruction program, twenty-four Brittain Fellows requested library instruction sessions. Among them, eight responded to the survey (30%).

There are three questions developed to understand Brittain Fellows' overall experience working with the instruction team and potential for future collaboration. In all three multiple-choice questions relating to the overall satisfaction, there is high level of positive feedback. 87.5% of respondents expressed high level satisfaction of their scheduling experience (Easy or Somewhat Easy). For the 12.5% of respondents who chose "somewhat difficult" (1 response), this was due to severe weather conditions causing a campus shutdown (Figure 1). 100% of responses expressed interest in scheduling more library instruction in future and would recommend library classes to colleagues (Figure 2, Figure 3). Additionally, Brittain Fellows used the open-ended questions to further state their appreciation of these instruction sessions as being "really helpful" and "very well-done".

Figure 1: Response to "How easy was it to schedule library instruction for your classes?"

Figure 2: Response to "Would you schedule library instruction for your ENG 1101/1102 class in the future?"

Figure 3: Response to "Would you recommend library instruction to your colleagues?"

One question was designed to understand the active learning approaches that the team uses in these sessions. The survey data showed 100% confirmation of librarians using an active learning approach in these instruction sessions, with 87.5% feedback asserting enough active learning was used in classroom, and 12.5% feedback hoping to have more active learning in their sessions (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Response to "Did the Librarian Who Taught Your Classes Use Active Learning Strategies?"

Two questions were designed to gauge the effectiveness of the instruction toward meeting the objectives of English 1101 and 1102. All confirmed that the library instruction sessions focused on the class goals and needs (Figure 5). They also confirmed that the instruction sessions had a positive impact on students' class assignments, with 75% "definitely yes" and 25% "probably yes" (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Response to "Did the Library Instruction Session Have a Positive Impact on Your Students' Work in the Class?"

Figure 6: Response to "Did the content of the library instruction reflect the goals and needs of your class?"

One lesson learned from the open-ended question data is that instructors appreciate and support the library's online resources, for example: online chat, research guides, and the database list on the website. Respondents also find post-class support helpful, such as: handouts, librarians' contact information for follow-up questions, and office hours.

Inspiration for Future Assessment

With the predominantly positive feedback on the library instruction sessions, the team nonetheless seeks improvement for the library instruction support for English 1101 and 1102. The assessment data sheds lights on a few venues to consider in future. In addition, these sessions are many students' first experience with the Georgia Tech Library, and therefore serve as a key to their interest in learning more about library resources. To pique students' interest beyond the session, librarians could further integrate their subject expertise into these sessions and expand their scope.

CONCLUSION

Creating a distributed teaching model, in which the responsibilities of teaching a single set of competencies are spread among a small team, allowed the Georgia Tech Library to fulfill its mission of supporting research and scholarship. The librarians comprising the instruction team reached students that they normally would not have, and they improved their skills as teachers. Should the popularity of the classes increase, the team is exploring new ways to scale-up their instruction to cover the nearly 3,000 new Georgia Tech freshmen arriving every year. In order to preserve institutional knowledge among the Brittain Fellows, the team will proactively reach out to the Fellows and offer their services. Fortunately, with the distributed model, the Georgia Tech Library will be far more prepared to manage these new challenges.

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Images for Figures

Figure 1

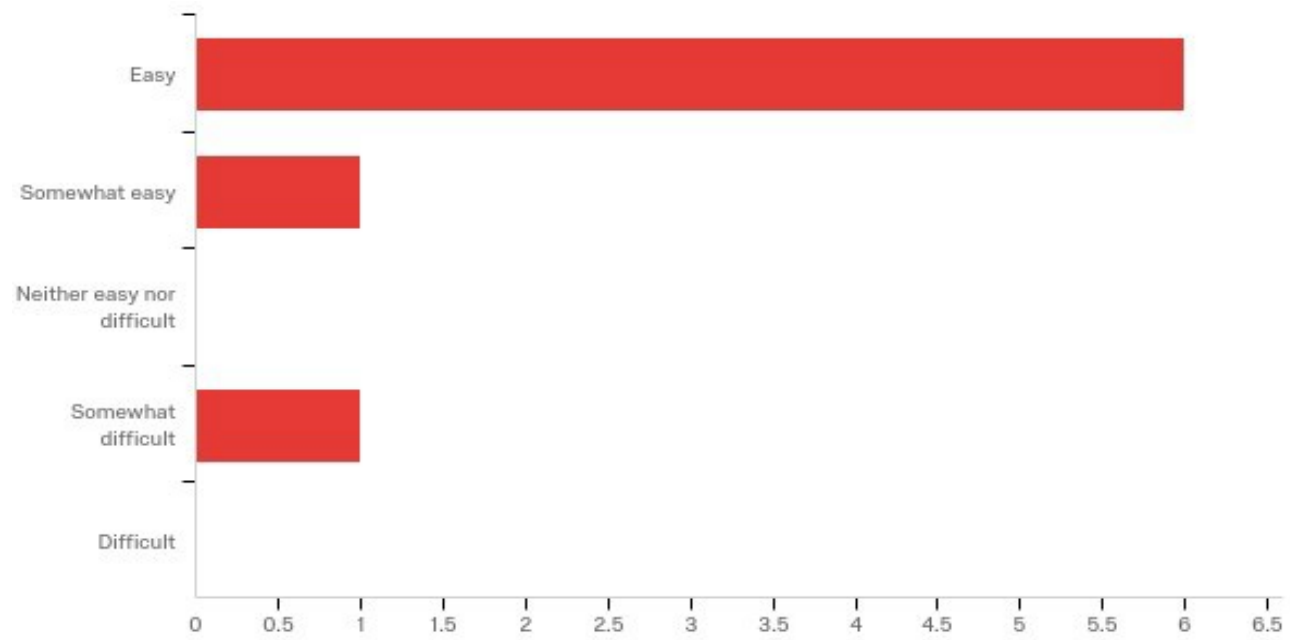


Figure 2

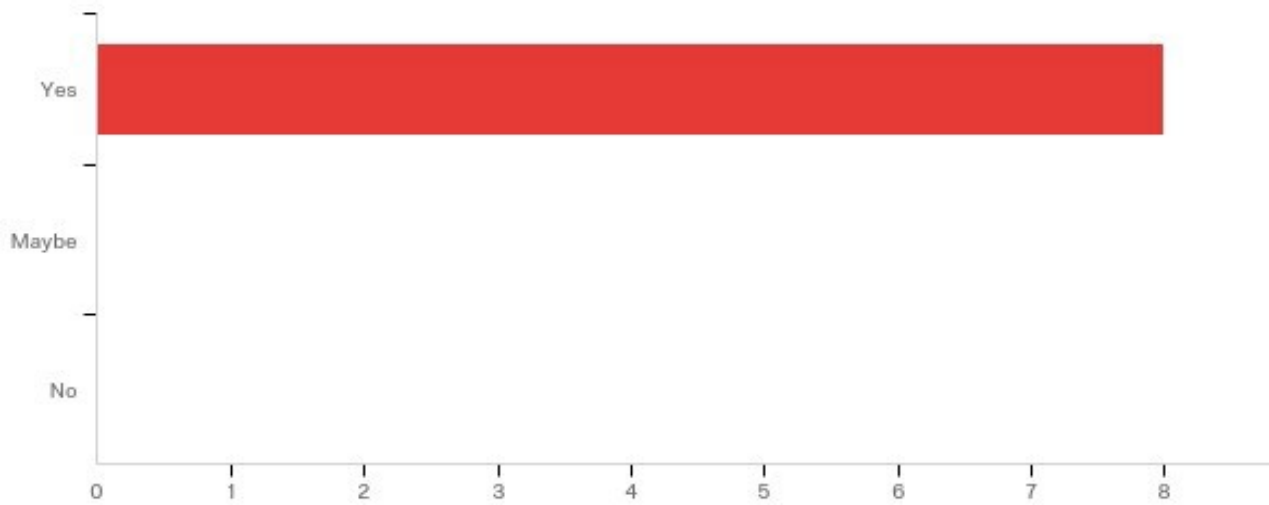


Figure 3

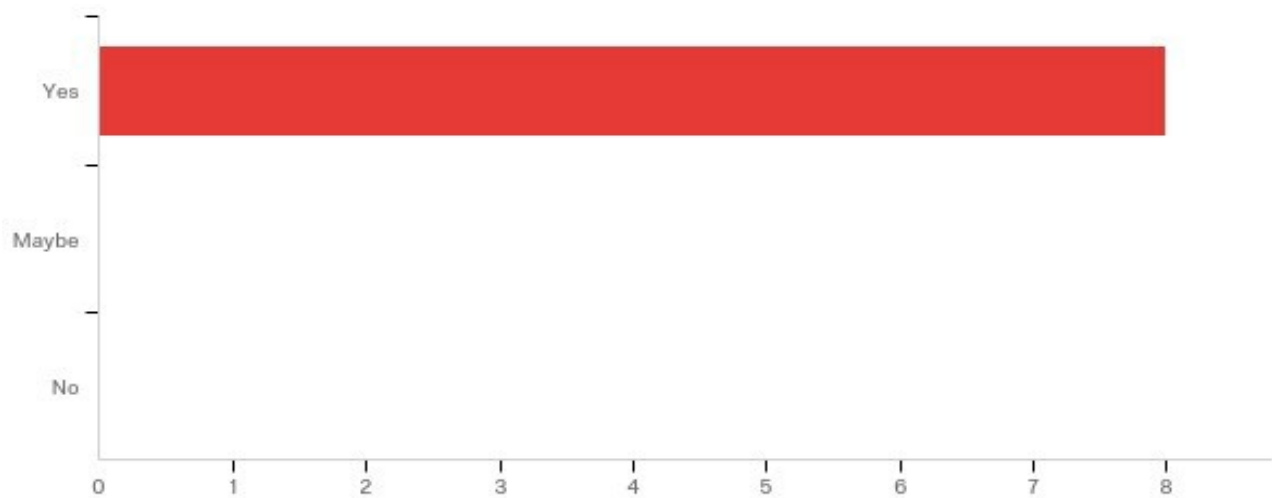


Figure 4

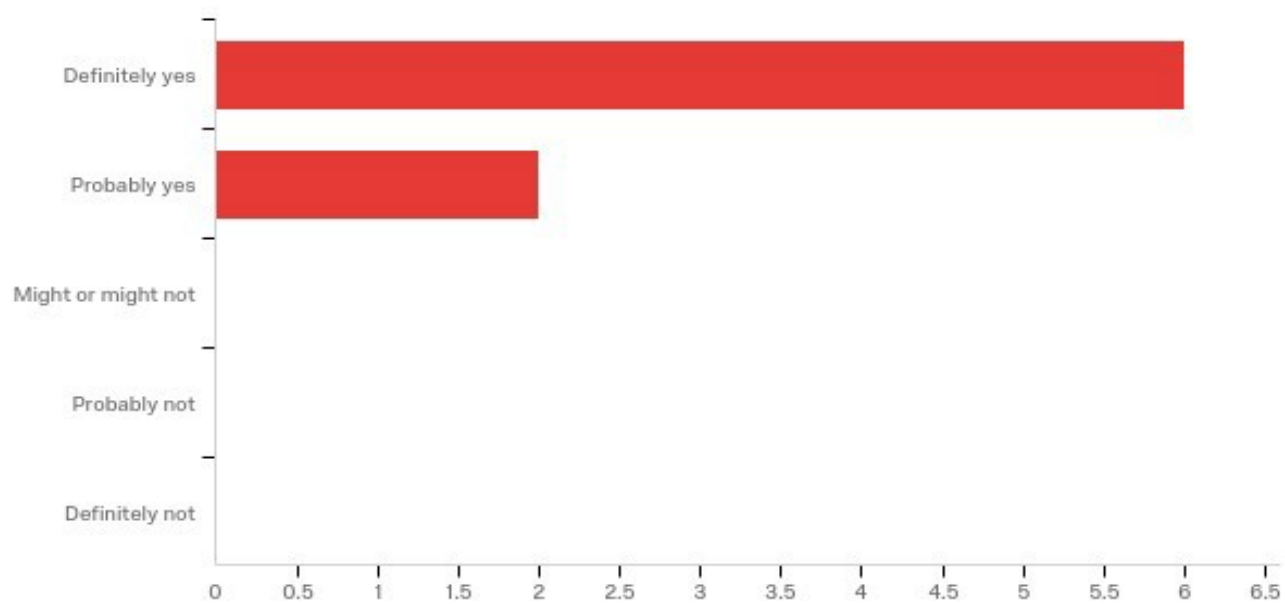


Figure 5

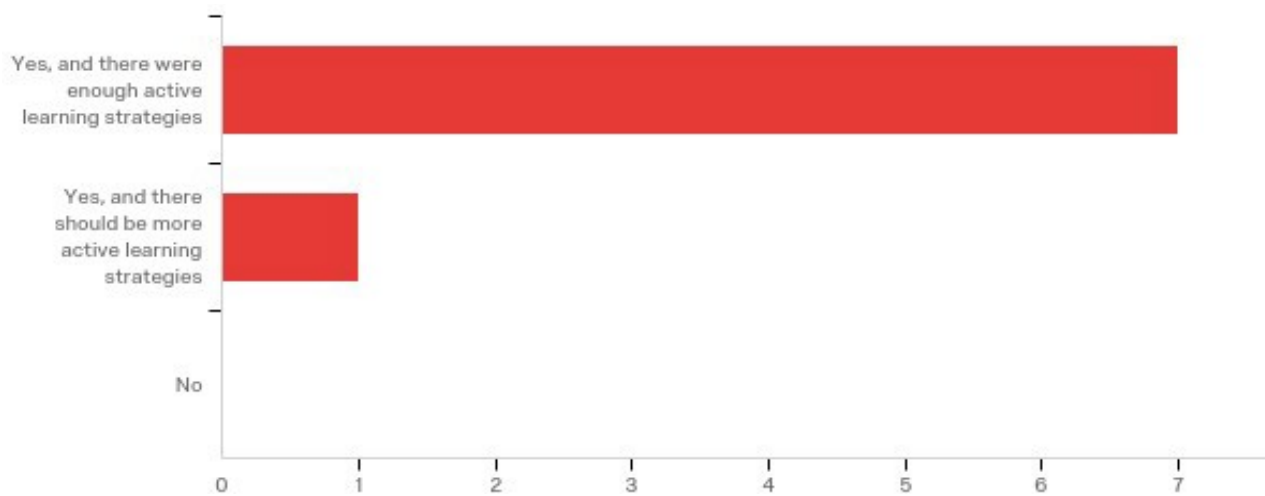
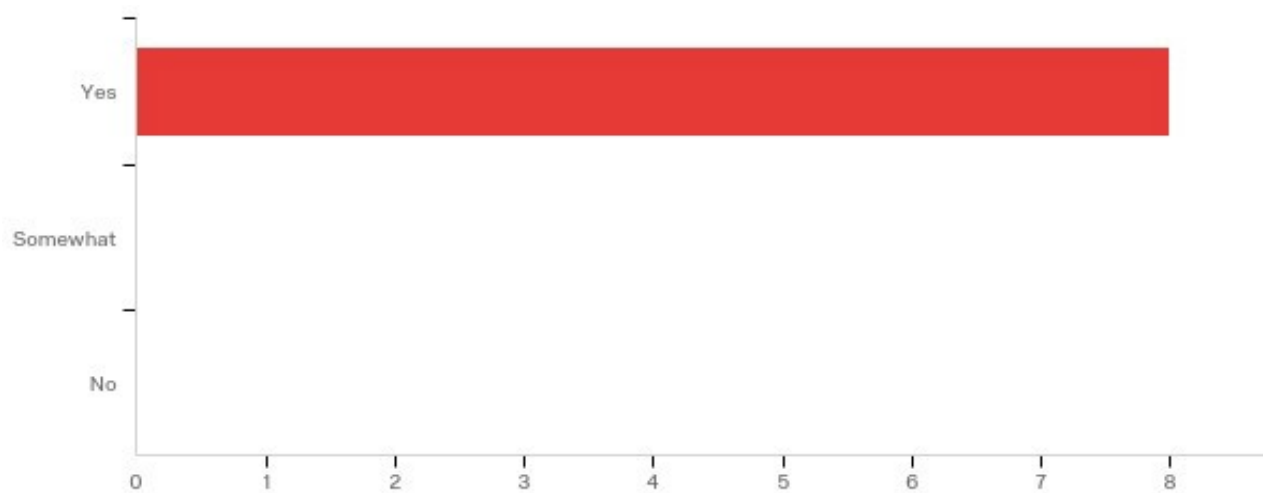
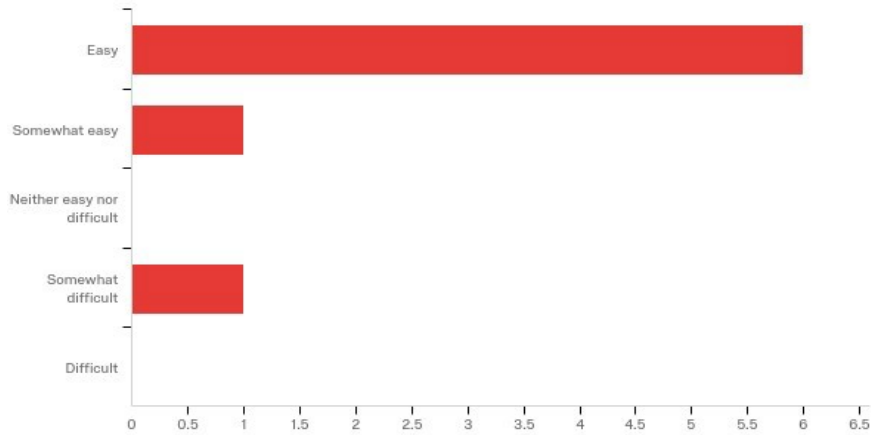


Figure 6

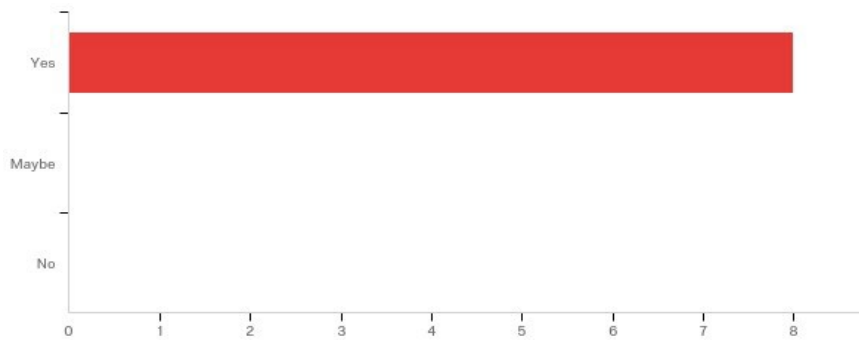


APPENDIX A: ENG 1101 & 1102 ASSESSMENT RESULTS

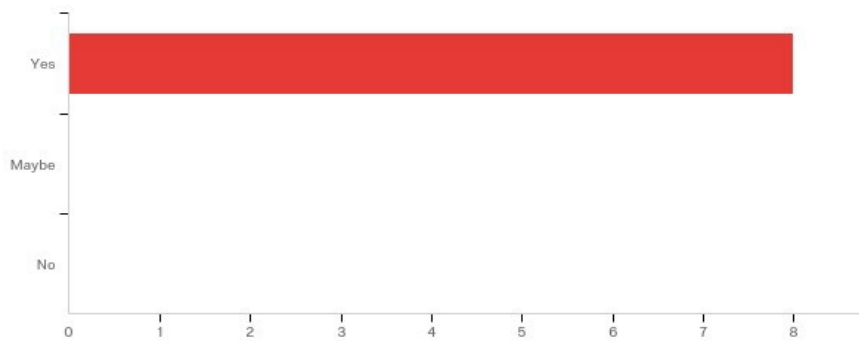
Q1 - How easy was it to schedule library instruction for your classes?



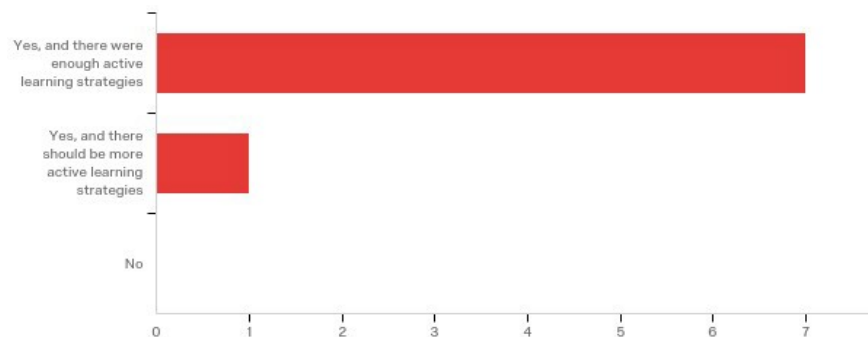
Q2 - Would you schedule library instruction for your ENG 1101/1102 class in the future?



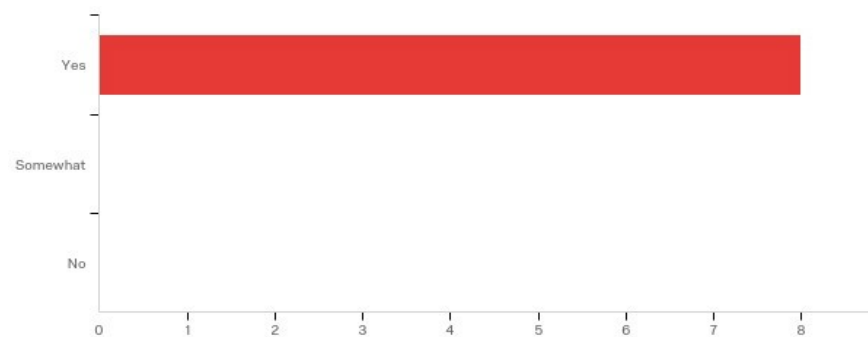
Q3 - Would you recommend library instruction to your colleagues?



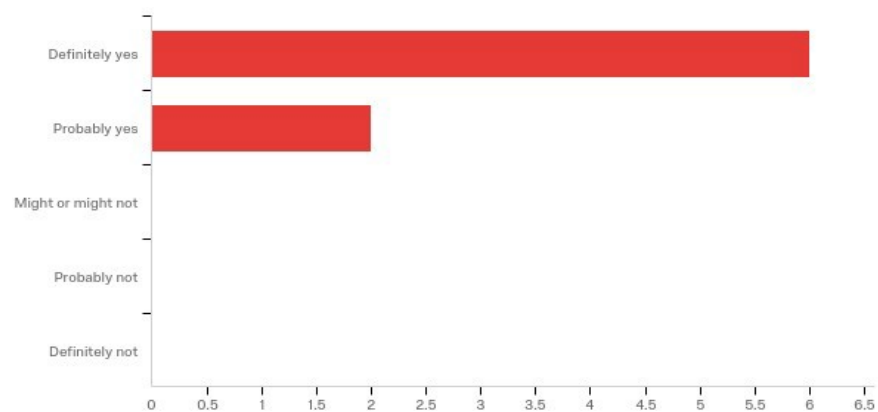
Q4 - Did the librarian who taught your classes use active learning strategies?



Q5 - Did the content of the library instruction reflect the goals and needs of your class?



Q6 - Did the library instruction session have a positive impact on your students' work in the class?



Q7 - Please share any feedback about student responses to the library instruction session, and/or your general impression of students' experience.

Please share any feedback about student responses to the library instruction session, and/or your general impression of students' experience.
Students seemed to find the information on websites to be helpful
My students benefited from the sessions I scheduled for them, across various media. That has been evidence in their work, as they've learned about the technologies they have access to here at Tech, and practiced with it on their own and through the drafting processes for their assignments.
n/a
Students tend to zone out during the presentation then ask for follow up contact information. More resources like office hours, or more direct follow up information, like a handout, with the Ask a Librarian and where to find the help desk in the library, might be really useful in the future.
Charlie Bennett talked to my class specifically about podcasting, and he was phenomenal --- I changed one of my assignments to incorporate some of his ideas. Very well-done.
My students really appreciated the library instruction day; they didn't know very much about the library's resources before the session. One student suggested that a tour of the library would also be helpful. It would also be useful to incorporate more active learning, perhaps having students find a source through the library's database about their paper topic.
Karen did a great job presenting information and engaging the class. This was really helpful!
Students really appreciated Charlie's knowledge and passion for his topic: his explanations and examples helped guide their projects.

Q8 - How we can improve library instruction for you and your students?

How we can improve library instruction for you and your students?
No specific suggestions at this time
I don't know that I'd recommend anything different than what the librarians who came to my class did.
n/a
Perhaps a follow-up assignment or exercise for students to complete by doing something on their own? Having one or two standard activities on locating articles or using databases that instructors could adapt might be a helpful starting point.
So far, so good.
See above.
N/A- Again great job utilizing time in a short (50 min) class period.
N/A

Q9 - Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?
n/a
The difficulty in scheduling a librarian was partly due to regular schedule complications and partly due to the hurricane! It is usually much less difficult!
Thank you! It was great!
Great work! Thanks for all you do.